THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI KAMALUDDIN AHMED): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Upto 31.3.94, certain varieties of iron and steel raw materials were available to exporters of engineering goods at international prices under the International Price Reimbursement Scheme (IPRS). With the withdrawal of IPRS for shipments made with effect from 1.4.94, exporters have been requesting for alternative arrangements for supply of iron and steel raw materials at international prices for export production.

(c) While the facility of duty free import of steel raw material is already available to the exporters of engineering goods under Duty Exemption Scheme, the Government has been continuing its efforts to find other alternatives for supply of iron and steel raw materials at near international prices.

Indian Biodiversity Patented in Foreign Countries

3554. SHRI RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that elements of Indian biodiversity are already being patented in foreign countries which is legal as per GATT agreement;

(b) whether Government have ensured that the benefits from these micro organisms will come into the country from where the originated; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Government does not maintain information on patents granted in foreign countries.

(b) and (c) Collection of micro-organisms from India does not at present require the consent of Government. However, India has signed the Convention on Biodiversity which provides inter alia that the source of the genetic resource shall share in the proceeds of the research done on that resource and in the patent if any given to the results of the research. Government is in the process of devising legislation for the conservation of biological diversity in accordance with the provisions of the Convention.

Import of Seeds

3555. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there has been a considerable improvement in the import of various seeds on account of liberalisation policy and if so, the details of seeds imported indicating countries of origin, value and type of seeds indicating the yields expected and the highest yield seeds already available in the country; and

(b) whether any new or exotic pests have also been imported alongwith the seeds and if so, the details thereof in view of earlier experience with P.L. 480 wheat indicating whether any responsibility has been fixed and corrective steps taken/proposed to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. There has been a considerable improvement in the import of various seeds since 1991-92 as compared to preceding years. The quantity of seeds imported during 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94 was 428.390 metric tons, 148.082 metric tons and 1645.987 metric tons respectively.

Seeds of Sunflower, other Oilseeds, Vegetables like Cabbage, Cauliflower, Tomato, ornamental plants, watermelon and Coarse Cereals have been imported